

IN MAULMAIN FEVER-WARD¹

By GEORGE GILBERT

FLOOD-TIME on Salwin River, Burma! *Pouk* trees and *stic-lac* in flower. By day the rush, the roar of water fretting at the knees of Kalgai Gorge, above which the Thoungyeen enters the main current. And the music of the elephants' bells as they come along the track bound down or mayhap up to work in the teak forests. By night the languorous scent of the *serai* vines luring the myriad moths, the wail of the gibbons, the rustle of the bamboos chafing their feathery leaves together in the winds that just falter between rest and motion.

At Kalgai the traders pause in going up or down, over or across. From everywhere they come, and coming, stay to chaffer, to chat, cheat, scheme, love—aye and even slay! Why not? It's life—raw life!

Take away the medicine. Give me rice curry and chicken and fish cooked with green bamboo tips and sourish-sweet *pilou* of river mussels. And then a whiff of *bhang* or black Malay tobacco that the gypsies of the sea smuggle in. . . .

My name? Paul Brandon will do. My father was a Stepney coster. Mother? Oh, a half-caste Mandalay woman. Yes, they were married at the mission. He took her home. I was born in London. But I ran away; came East. . . .

Don't mind if I babble, ma'am. And forgive me if I pull at the sheets. Or if the sight of a white woman, old, patient, trying to be kind to me, makes me shy. When my head clears, I'm white; when the fever mist comes over my brain, I see things through my brown mother's eyes.

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Thanks for fixing the ice pack on my head. No, that mark on my forehead is not from an old bruise. A Karen-Laos woman put it there with her tattoo needles. It has a meaning. It is the Third Eye of Siva.

Thanks for pulling-to the shade. Those bamboo things the yellow and brown folk use are not shades. They are full of holes where the weaving is that holds them together. Why, you can see through them — see the most unbelievable things. . . .

Oh, yes, the mark on my forehead. A girl put it there with her needles. Now that you touch it, it *is* sore. Well, so would *your* head be sore if a giant python had smashed his wedge-shaped head in death stroke against your wrinkled brow, executing the Curse of Siva.

How long have I been in Maulmain? . . . A week? Well, I won't be here another. But it's queer how a man will drift — to his own people.

Thanks for the little morphine pills. Yes, I know what they are. Give me a dozen, and they may take hold. A man who has smoked *bhang*, black Malay tobacco and opium, and who has drunk *bino* isn't going to be hurt by sugar pills. They only wake me up, steady me.

Why did n't I know Pra Oom Bwaht was a liar? . . .

Karen town on Thoungyeen River! Temple bells chiming or booming through the mystic, potent dusk; mynah-birds scolding in the *thy-tsi* trees. Frogs croaking under the banyans' knees in the mud. Women coming to worship in the temples — women with songs on their full red lips and burdens on their heads — and mighty little else on them. And the fat, lazy priests and the monks going about, begging bowls in hand, with their *cheelahs* to lead them as they beg their evening rice.

Thanks for the lime juice, ma'am. Let me talk. It eases me.

To Karen town on Thoungyeen River — Karen town with its Temple of Siva — I came long before the rains. This year? Mayhap. Last? What do the dead years matter now?

To Karen town I brought wire rods for anklet-making,

cloths, mirrors, sweetmeats—an elephant's load. Once there, I let my elephant driver go.

Three days of good trade I had, and my goods were about gone, turned into money and antique carved silver and gold work. At the close of the third day, as I sat in front of the *sana*, smoking, smoking, smoking, listening to the buzz of the women and children, Pra Oom Bwaht came.

He was tall for a Karen man of the hills, all of five foot two. The Karen plainsmen are taller. He sat a space beside me in silence—sure mark of a man of degree among such chatterers.

"Have you seen the temples of Karen?" he asked finally.

Lazily I looked him over. He was sturdy—a brave man, I thought. He had a cunning eye, a twisty mouth, and in his forehead's middle a black mark showing harsh against his yellow skin.

"What's that?" I asked him, touching the mark. He winced when I did it.

"Dread Bhairava," he said, using the Brahman word for Siva, Queen of the Nagas. He was a snake-worshiper, then. Mighty little of these people or their talk or dialects I don't know.

"Come with me, white trader?" he asked me. "I am Pra Oom Bwaht."

Idly I went. So, after visiting the other temples, we came to the Temple of Siva, perched on its rocks, with the river running near and its little grounds well kept. It was the hour of evening worship. The worshipers, mostly women, were coming in with votive offerings.

But among them all there was a Laos girl, shapely as a roe deer, graceful, brown, with flashing black eyes and shining black hair neatly coiled on top of her pretty head, and with full red lips. As she passed, Oom Bwaht just nudged me—pointed. She turned off at a fork of the path, alone.

I glanced at Pra Oom Bwaht. His twisty mouth was wreathed in a smile.

"She lives at the end of that little path," he tempted. "She is Nagy N'Yang."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

He nodded again and went away. I turned down the side path after the Laos girl. . . .

There was a full moon that night. About the middle of the night we came up the path to the temple again, the Laos girl and I.

"Come," she had said to me when I had asked her for my heart's desire, "come to the temple, and I can prove it is folly."

So we came. The temple door was open. The priests were gone — no one has to watch a Naga temple at night. The dread of Siva is enough to protect it.

A rift in the temple roof let in a shaft of white moonlight. It struck upon the image of Siva. The image was seated on a white ox, carved of some white stone. A sash around the image was made up of human heads; it had six arms, each covered with carved snakes that were so lifelike they seemed to writhe in the wavering light. In the middle of the god's forehead was the mark of the third eye — the scar of Siva.

We went slowly down toward the image. Before it was a huge chest. Nagy N'Yang motioned me to sit on it. She sat beside me. Again I pleaded with her for my heart's desire.

She pushed me away.

"You are afraid to be near me," I mocked.

"Hush," she pleaded. "I am afraid — of yielding to you."

I moved to clasp her, my heart leaping at her confession. She smote her little hands sharply together. I heard a shuffling of softly shod feet in the passage behind the image.

Wat Na Yang, chief priest of the temple, stood before us with his yellow robes, his yellow skin, his hands calmly folded across his paunch. "What seek ye, children?" he asked.

"The way of love," I laughed. I plunged my hand into my robe and felt the gold against my middle.

In the great chest on which we sat something awoke to life. I heard a stir, a rustle, a noise as of straining.

"Nagy speaks," the priest warned.

I felt the Laos girl shudder by my side.

"What is it?" I asked. I stood up. A creeping horror came over me.

Nagy N'Yang sprang up as I did and flung back the lid of the great chest with a strength I had not expected. Out over her shoulder shot a long coil, then another. When she stood erect in the moon-glow, a great rock python was wrapped about her matchless form. The mark of Siva on her forehead gleamed against her ivory brow like an evil blotch, yet it did not take from her beauty, her alluring grace; nor did the immense bulk of the python bear her down.

"The great serpent knows his own," whispered the yellow priest. He pointed with his fat forefinger. I saw the red tongue of the python play over the ivory bosom of the girl.

Yet I did not shudder. It seemed fitting. They were so in harmony with their surroundings.

The eyes of the python blazed in the moon-glow like rubies of the pigeon-blood hue, then like garnets, then like glow-worms; then they sank to a lower range of colors and finally to rest. He was asleep under her caresses. She patted his wedge-shaped head, soothing him. Ah, that it had been my head she thus fondled!

Suddenly Nagy N'Yang seized the great serpent just back of the head, uncoiled it from her with a free, quick succession of movements and cast it into the great chest again. Then, with a curious indrawing of the breath, as if relieved from a nerve strain, she sat down on the chest.

"Well have I seen," I said to her. "But little do I understand."

"I may not wed," she said. "I am Siva's."

"I can kill the snake—"

The thing in the chest stirred its coils uneasily.

"Be silent!" commanded the fat priest. "Would you slay little N'Yang?"

I shuddered. A great bat came in through the rift that let in the moon-glow. In the trees over the temple a

gibbon wailed in his sleep like a sick child — “*Hoop-oi-oi-oi!*”

Wat Na Yang extended his arm before him in a gesture of dismissal.

“Go!” he commanded. Then he placed a heavy hand on my shoulder.

Nagy N’Yang stood up, bowed her head and went down the path the moonbeams made, went into the shadow near the door, and out.

The fat priest sat down on the chest beside me. The mottled terror in the chest was still again.

“She was wed,” the priest began, “but on her wedding-day we claimed her. Her husband cannot claim her. But if some one unwittingly kills the great python, she will be free. It must be some one not a friend of the husband. No one will kill the python here. She is temple-bound for life —”

The bulk inside thrilled to life again. I heard the scales rustling as the great coils rose and fell.

“Go, you!” he ordered. “The goddess likes you not. Even if you take the girl, I can call her back or kill her by touching her flesh with a single scale from the Naga in the chest.”

He walked with me to the door. At the portal we stood for a space, silent.

The tiled entrance was flooded with moonlight. In the middle of it a cobra lay, stretched out, seemingly asleep — a small cobra, deadly none the less.

“You see,” the gross priest said, pointing to the deadly serpent there. “Nagy’s spirit watches you here, too. But the girl she did not harm.”

Filled with some spirit of Western bravado I could not stifle, I stepped close to the cobra and stamped on its head.

“That for all scaly serpents!” I jeered at him. I stood on the cobra’s head while it lashed out its life.

The fat yellow priest watched me, and I could see hatred and horror struggle for mastery on his face.

Coming close to me he began to talk in long, rolling sentences, of which I here and there caught a word. But I caught the sense of what he was saying.

Oh, yes — the fat priest. It was there, in front of the temple, that he put on me, in Sanskrit, the Curse of Siva, ending:

“With gurgling drops of blood, that plenteous stream
From throats quickly cut by us —”

I laughed at him, threw a yellow coin at his face, kicked the dead cobra into the door of the temple — and went down the path toward the Laos girl's hut.

At the hut door she sat, silent, wonderful.

“Come!” I commanded.

“Where?” she asked.

“To Kalgai town by Salwin River,” I answered. I took her in my arms.

Yes, I took her! Why not? She was mine, was n't she? Yes, I took her! Not down the Thoungyeen River or the road along it. Why? We feared pursuit. Five miles below Karen a little hill stream comes to the Thoungyeen River. I never heard its name. We went up that to its springs and then along to the Hlineboay Chuang.

We traveled slowly, afoot, on cattle-back, on elephant-back — as the hill-folk could take us, or as we cared to go. Nagy N'Yang at first was moody, but as we left her own village far behind and got among the greater hills, she was gayer and gayer. I think when we came to Shoaygoon Plains she was happy. I was. It was in Shoaygoon *zana* that I let her tattoo my forehead with the mark of Siva, to please her and quiet her superstitious fears. It was wrong, yes, for all-whites; but for me, with a brown mother? Mayhap not. . . .

And so we came to Kalgai in Kalgai Gorge, and the rains were not yet come.

We were early. The traders' huts were not filled. Only a few were taken. A Eurasian here, a Russian there, a Tibetan there, and yonder a Chinese.

So I had my choice of the best places and picked the best house in the gorge — on the rock spit that juts into the gorge's biggest bend over the whirlpool.

The house we took was of teak beams and bamboo.

For a few gold coins I had its use, entire, with its mats, pots, kettles.

There was a little shilly-shallying of trade, which I did not get into. Traders came up and down and across. I did n't care for traffic just then.

Nagy N'Yang was happy, she told me. I believed it. She went about her little household tasks neatly.

"After the big rains," I told her, "we two take boat for Maulmain and beyond." I was due for a trip up past Rangoon for temple brasses and carved ivory. The air was heavy with the promise of the first of the rains.

"Where you go, I go," she laughed, stuffing my mouth with rice and fish.

She cuddled closer to me on the eating mat we had spread out.

A shadow fell across the open doorway. She screamed.

It was Pra Oom Bwaht, who smiled down on us with his twisty smile.

"Welcome," I said.

He came in boldly and sat down.

"You went quickly from Karen," he said simply.

I could feel my Laos girl wince as she leaned against me. I clutched the dagger inside my robe.

Pra Oom Bwaht smiled his twisty smile.

"How come you here?" I demanded.

"Why should I not?" he asked. "Especially to see my sister —" He pointed to Nagy N'Yang.

She sighed and laughed a little nervous laugh.

"I did not know," I said, "that she was your sister. You are welcome to our poor house."

Pra Oom Bwaht smiled again, got up and stalked out. As he went, the first patter of the rains came, beating up the dust in the space before the door for a few seconds, then laying it all in a puddle of mud again as a great dash of fury came into the storm. But it was only the first baby rain, not enough to make Kalgai whirlpool talk out loud.

I turned to Nagy. She was staring out into the storm.

"I did n't know he was your brother," I said to her.

"All Laos are brother and sister," she replied.

Well, I've found it best to keep out of native feuds and family jangles. "Some old village quarrel back of it," I thought.

All night it rained, and in the morning the river was talking to the cliffs in a louder voice. And the water was up and coming. Bits of drift were floating.

Among the traders I found Pra Oom Bwaht settled in a little hut off by himself. He had scant store of Karen cloths, Laos baskets, some hammered brass. He was sitting on a big box, and it was covered with a mat woven of tree-cotton fiber. He arose to meet me and came to the door.

"Let us chat here," he said. "I like the sun better than the shade."

It was queer to deny me a seat beside him, I thought; but I let it pass. I was not paying much attention to details then.

So we sat in the doorway and watched the rain and heard the river talking to Kalgai Gorge. Trade was slack and would be until the greater rains came bearing boats and rafts from above and over and beyond, from up the river and the little rivers coming into it.

I could make nothing of Pra Oom Bwaht, I say. I left him and went out to chaffer a bit.

"Who knows the Karen fool?" Ali Beg, just down from Szechuan after trading rifles to Chinese Moham-medans for opium, demanded of me from the door of his own place.

"Why?" I asked.

"He trades like a fool, letting a rupee's worth go for a pice."

"Let him," I laughed, "so long as he keeps away from me."

"And yours?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Come in and drink of tea with me," he invited.

So I went in and we sat eye to eye, face to face, across his little teakwood table, each squatting on his heels, and drank tea and talked of many things.

"Now that we have said all the useless things, tell me

what is at the bottom of thy heart," Ali demanded. Up there the important things are kept for the dessert of the talk.

He was an old friend, with his coal-black eyes, great hairy arms and rippling black beard.

"Thus it was, heart of my soul," I said, laying hold of a lock of his beard up under his green turban, in token of entire truth-telling. "Thus it was"—and I tugged at the lock of beard. So I told him the tale, from the time of my going to Karen until the time of my coming to Kalgai town and the arrival of Pra Oom Bwaht.

He sat a long time in silence.

Then he reached into his robe and drew out a fine dagger of Sikh smithy work, hammered, figured on the blade, keen, heavy of hilt; in the tip of the handle a ball of polished steel, hollow and filled with mercury. It was a throwing knife.

"Take this," Ali urged. "I taught thee how to cast it at a foe years ago when we first went up the great river together. I go from here to-night by boats toward Maulmain. It will fall out with thee as it will fall out."

I took the dagger because it was Ali's gift, not because I was afraid. Why should I fear anything that walked on two legs or four? Even though it wore a tail or horns?

At nightfall I went back to my house on the rock spit. The stream was roaring now—like a baby lion.

Nagy N'Yang was sitting in the open doorway as I came up the path. I saw she had her chin in her hand and was thinking deeply.

"I saw him," I made answer to the question in her eyes.

"Did he receive you well?"

"Except that he did not have me to sit beside him on his big trader's box in his hut, but took me to the doorway to talk. It was not friendly."

"Aha!" Just like that—soft, thoughtful.

"But what do I care for him, with his Karen cloths or hammered brass?" I chattered at her. "Come to me, Sweet One of a Thousand Delights."

So the days and the evenings and nights went by, and the greater rains followed the lesser. The river crept

up and up and up, roaring now to the cliffs, like old lions.

Then came a day when on going home at eve I stooped at the river's brim near the house we had on the rock spit, and felt of the water. It was chilled. "The flood is full," I thought. I had felt the snow-chill from the Tibetan Himalayas in hoary Salwin's yellow flood. When that comes, the utmost sources of the world have been tapped for flood water.

"The river will begin to fall to-morrow," I told Nagy N'Yang when I came into the place. "We will go soon after, when the big trading is over."

She smiled at me. Then she patted with her soft hand the place where she had tattooed on my brow the mark of the third eye of Siva. It was healed.

"I care not where we go, or if we go or stay, so long as you are with me," she whispered, close against my side.

After the evening meal we sat in the doorway and heard the river talking. Often the big whirlpool sighed or moaned.

"It will almost cover our rock spit," I said. I knew by the lift of it by day and the noise of it by night that the flood was a mighty one and would spend its chief force that night.

She nodded and nestled closer to me.

Out of the shade before us a greater shade silently loomed.

"I greet you, my sister and brother," Pra Oom Bwaht said, standing before us.

Nagy N'Yang shivered against my side. I felt the dagger under my robe.

A single beam from our brazier inside struck across his twisty face. He stretched out his hand toward Nagy N'Yang.

"A gift for my sister," he said.

She half reached her hand out, took it back, reached again and took it back; then, as if impelled by a force too strong to resist, reached again. Into her palm dropped something that shone for a tiny space in the yellow gleam of the brazier's ray. She shut her hand—

caught it to her breast. I thought it was a tiny golden bangle—then.

“Come,” said Pra Oom Bwaht. “Let us walk apart for a moment. I have family matters to talk over. Your husband will permit.”

I wanted her to protest, but she did not. She got up calmly and went with him out onto the rock spit. I was between them and the mainland. They could not go away by river. No harm would come to her, it seemed. “Some tribal custom to be attended to,” I thought. It is best not to be too curious about such matters up among the hills of Burma and Siam, ma’am. If you are, your wife suffers, not you.

For a long time I could hear them talking out there in the dark, with the river talking in between whiles. Once I heard a sound like a great sigh or sobbing moan. “The whirlpool at the river’s bed,” I thought, “taking in a great tree or raft.”

Soon after that the back mat of the house lifted, and I thought they had come in by that way. I sat, peering into the gloom inside, ready to greet them, when something crashed on to the back of my head and I forgot for a time.

I came back to memory in a daze and feeling much pain in my head. The brazier flared beside me. Bending over me was Pra Oom Bwaht, with a knife in his hand.

“Son of a pig!” he said.

“Where is Nagy N’Yang?” I asked.

He smiled at me—his cursed twisty smile.

“On the river’s brink she waits, bound to a great teak log lodged at the end of the spit,” he cried hoarsely. “When the flood comes to its full, she will float away—”

I spat full into his face. I thought it would make him slay me.

He wiped the spittle from his chops calmly. When an Oriental takes an insult calmly, beware! There is more to come.

“She was my wife,” he said, as if that explained everything.

“Was or is, it makes no difference to me,” I stormed.

“She is mine now.”

"She is Siva's," he jeered. "Think you that as she swirls down into the whirlpool at the river's bend the great river python, mother of all the pythons, will not take her? Placed I the yellow scale of Nagy in her hand for naught?"

I shuddered. The legend of the great river python at Kalgai Gorge had been told to me oft. It slept in the great pool where the whirlpool formed in flood-time and only came out for prey when the depths were stirred by a monstrous flood such as this one, the natives said.

"Why did you tell me she was your sister?" I demanded.

"We made it up, she and I. She was wedded, as the priest told you, but to me. I was listening in the bamboos when you planned your trip here from Karen that night after the priest cursed you from the door of Siva's temple. I heard him curse you and saw you turn down the path to our hut. If you had slain the python in the temple, without me helping, she would have been freed. We planned that you should make love, a little. Enough so you would kill the great snake and win her from it; I to come after and take her. But you won her whole heart, curse you —"

Up went his hand to slay. While he had raved and chattered at me, my head had been clearing. As he stiffened for the death stroke, I reached for the down-coming hand and caught his wrist—the wrist whose sinewy muscles were driving the knife home. I held his arm back. He clutched for my throat with his other hand. We strove, and I rolled him and came on top. Up I surged, dragging him with me. With one awful thrust I sent him crashing against the wall.

He had barely come to rest against the teak beams before his hand went up and I dodged — just as his knife whizzed past my ear. Plucking the great dagger of Ali Beg from my bosom, I cast it, in the manner of the Inner Mongolian Mohammedans. The great blade plunged forward. I had pinned him to the wall as a butterfly collector pins a specimen to a card in his collecting box.

I stepped forward to get my dagger. Pra Oom Bwaht,

his throat full of blood, his heart seared with black hatred, glared at me.

"The Curse of Siva remain on you and yours. . . ."

So he died.

Plucking my dagger from him, I kicked over the glowing brazier and raced for the rock spit's end as he crashed down—mere battered clay.

As I came to it, the last of the rain for the night whipped my face, reviving me. The moon peeped forth. There was no teak log there!

Another rift in the clouds made plain my error. The flood was over all former flood-marks. The teak log, as the moon's second peep showed, was on the point of rocks, but they were now in the stream, many paces from the present shore-line. The log, caught on the jagged stones, hung and swayed. It was just on the point of going out. I could see a dark mass, midway of the log. "It is Nagy N'Yang," I thought. The hut was blazing now from the brazier's scattered coals, giving me plenty of light.

I glanced about the rock spit. A few paces to the right something black showed in the gloom. I went to it quickly, hoping to find a boat. It was a great chest. Feeling for the key or handle, I clutched a catch. I turned it, threw up the lid, just as the moon came forth.

Out of the depths of the box reared a great python, hissing horribly. I recoiled in terror. The box, as I saw in the moon-glow, was the snake box of Karen temple, the one in which Nagy N'Yang's serpent had been kept.

Pra Oom Bwaht had had it carried to Kalgai Gorge and also to our rock spit that night to suit some of his own black schemes of vengeance. His bearers had carried the box unwittingly. While I trembled, the great snake glided to the river's brink and disappeared. I now had the big chest and thought to use it as a rough boat to rescue my love.

Then I turned to view the teak log again. I tugged at the chest. It was too heavy for me. Another fitful rift of moonlight came, and I saw the giant teak log sway. Without waiting for more ill fortune, I plunged

into the river and swam through the swirling eddies for the log.

I just made it. But at the touch of my numbed finger on its root ends, it started. The mere touch was enough to set it adrift. I clutched, caught a root fiber, held, edged along the rootlet till I had a better hold, drew myself up on to the root end of the huge log — and then heard the sobbing moan of Kalgai whirlpool.

Already we were at the pool's edge. The log began to whirl and sway. I made a prayer for my Laos girl, that she might be unconscious during the plunge below. If she were, she would live, as she would not be breathing. As for me, I felt I could hold my breath the two minutes necessary. I often had seen the logs go down the suck-hole and come up. The average time was two minutes for that. What happened to them under the pool I had no means of knowing. I hoped to be able to cling to the log. The girl was bound fast. . . . The log up-ended and went down!

We swirled through great depths, and often I felt us hit against rocks and other logs in the lower silences. At the pit's bottom there seemed no sound, but on the way down and up there was a great roaring. It seemed that my lungs would burst. But I kept my breath, having, as you see, great lung space. We began to rise, and as I felt it, something slowed us down. I felt weak and was about to drop off when something bound me to the great log, pressing me tightly against the mass of roots. So we shot into the moonlight.

I was wrapped in the folds of the mighty python, who had thrown a coil about the tree-trunk in the lowest depths of the pool! That immense weight it was that had kept us from emerging sooner. We had come up below the maelstrom upon emerging.

My right arm was free. I reached my belt with it and found my dagger there. In the moonlight, over the coils of the monster, I could see the ivory-white face of my Laos girl as she lay out on the huge log like a crushed lily. I could not tell if she still lived or had died.

The motion of reaching for my dagger aroused the python. It thrust its head back toward my face, questing

with its tongue, that queer organ with which it sees in the dark. I felt the darting, forked terror on my dripping features. The python threw back its coil a bit and thrust at my forehead with its wedge-shaped head, using the python's death stroke. I had still sense enough to draw my head to one side, but not before the hornlike, rounded head-front had dazed me with a glancing blow on the brow, where the mark of Siva had been tattooed by Nagy N'Yang.

Again I saw the beast draw back its head for a surer stroke. As it struck, I held the dagger true in front of its oncoming head. The force of the blow, not my strength, caused the blade of the dagger to sink into the immense, hard, tense neck-muscles, through and through. The snake, furious with pain, stricken to death, in one awful convulsive struggle cast itself into the raging Salwin, taking the dagger of Ali Beg with it. Why it did not take me down in its coils, I know not. . . .

Yes, I *am* sweating now. I feel better. My head is clearer. . . .

I wish Nagy N'Yang were here to lay her cool, ivory-white hand on my forehead where the python's wedge-shaped head crashed against mine—on the black mark of Siva. . . .

But my fever is breaking.

Yes, I feel easier, much easier. . . .

Yes, that is all of my story. . . .

What? Ali Beg found us together on a giant teak log at the river's bend at Maung Haut, where he had stopped to trade? And, tightly clasped in Nagy's hand was something strange? Show it me!

It is the belly scale of a great river python.

Burn it! Hold the night taper flame to it! Ah, that ends the fat priest's evil spell!

Where is Ali Beg? Here! And Nagy? Here, too!!

Wheel our cots together, ma'am!

Only let me clasp her hand again. Thanks; *it is warm; she is alive!*

No; we won't go up-country again. Why? Because when our first child comes, I want it born outside—out from under the shadow of the dread Curse of Siva!